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ABSTRACT

Murray State University (Kentucky) has approached the internationalization of the business curriculum by creating a bachelor of arts degree program requiring 2 years of foreign language study. To assess the program's overall success, three student surveys were undertaken. The first polled entering freshman business students in fall 1990 about their high school foreign language study and plans for such study in college. The second polled business students in foreign language classes about their degree plans and reasons for pursuing language study. The third surveyed seniors graduating in the 1991 calendar year about their foreign language study and international education activities. Results are presented. It is concluded that: (1) a growing majority of business students enter the university with some high school foreign language background; (2) introduction and active promotion of the new bachelor's degree program option increased foreign language study among business students; (3) almost a third of the language students who are also studying business are pursuing majors or minors in a foreign language, suggesting some cross-fertilization of disciplines; and (4) business students studying foreign languages appear much more likely to participate in a range of international education activities. Far-ranging student and institutional benefits are seen.
(Author/MSE)

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Foreign Language Study Among Business Students: A Foundation for Internationalization?

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Abstract

While substantial progress toward the internationalization of business education in the United State has been made, much remains to be done. Much of the effort to date has focussed on international content within the business curriculum. Broad cultural, environmental and foreign language content have been built into international business programs, but not into the typical curriculum of general business students. Murray State University has addressed this problem by creating and promoting a Bachelor of Arts in Business (BAB) degree program which requires two years of foreign language study. This study, which reports the results of three surveys of student groups, is desisgned to measure the impact of these efforts. The first survey polled entering freshmen business students in the Fall of 1990 about their study of foreign language in high school and plans for such study in college. The second polled business students in foreign language classes about their degree plans and reasons for pursuing language study. The third polled seniors graduating in the 1991 calendar year about their foreign language study and international education activities. In addition to documenting planned and actual behavior, the studies sought to identify the reasons why business students choose to study or not study foreign language as part of their degree program.

I. Language Study in the Internationalization of Business Education at MSU

In company with all AACSB accredited schools, the College of Business and Public Affairs at Murray State University has sought to enhance the international dimension of its business programs. Much of the AACSB emphasis has been on the international content of the business curriculum. The inadequacy of this narrow focus is obvious. It will broaden under the proposed revision of the curriculum standards to include the full range of the business student's education.

Many schools have responded to AACSB pressure by creating degree programs in international business. As valuable as these programs are, the larger concern is the international education of all business students in all business degree programs. This concern is dominant for schools such as ours for whom the traditional three "R's" of education are "remote, rural, and regional." The lack the resources, corporate environment and innate student interest render a worthwhile international business degree program difficult.

For these reasons, our approach has been to augment curriculum development within the College with greater utilization of other resources within the degree programs of our students. Our students receive substantial instruction with an international perspective in two required series of

courses. The first is a freshman level series of World Civilization courses. The second is a sophomore level humanities series focussing on classics within Western literary and philosophical traditions. The result is a solid twelve hour base of international instruction.

Four years ago, we initiated a program designed to encourage business students to incorporate foreign language courses into their studies. We did so by designing a Bachelor of Arts in Business degree program as an option to the Bachelor of Science in Business program, which had been the sole program for business students. In addition to the courses described above, the BAB program includes twelve hours of foreign language courses. Included in the program are advanced placement options for the increasing number of Kentucky students who take foreign language courses as a recommended part of the state's college preparatory curriculum.

Our objective in creating this program was to achieve a solid 24 hour foundation of international and language courses which a substantial body of business students would complete by the end of their sophomore year. This group, we hypothesized, would; 1) be much more prepared for and receptive to the international components of their business courses, 2) be much more likely to participate in the wide range of experiential international education opportunities available to them at Murray State, and 3) be much more likely to pursue advanced language and international studies opportunities as juniors and seniors.

In four years, we have completed most of the orientation process required to familiarize faculty advisers with this program. We have also developed increasingly effective techniques for informing entering freshmen of this option. Interest and participation has grown each year, with satisfying anecdotal success stories to mark our progress.

Pleasing as they are, such incidents are not sufficient to evaluate the overall success of the program. To obtain a better overall picture, we conducted surveys in both semesters of the 1990 academic year of all business students enrolled in foreign language classes. We augmented this effort

in Fall 1990 with a survey of the 305 entering freshmen who declared planned business majors. Finally, we administered a similar instrument to students in selected business courses who plan to graduate in calendar 1991. Our objectives were to measure their participation in language study, their academic and professional objectives in that effort, and the types of international education opportunities in which they participated or planned to participate. In addition, we asked those freshmen students who had chosen not to pursue language study the reasons for that decision. The results of these studies are presented in the following sections.

II. Entering Freshmen and Graduating Seniors - 1990/1991

The results of the survey of entering freshmen are summarized in Table 1. The major components of the study are; 1) foreign language study in high school, 2) planned foreign language study at MSU, 3) reasons given for not studying foreign language at MSU, and 4) planned participation in international education opportunities at MSU.

Figure 1 indicates that a full 86% of entering freshmen report studying a foreign language in high school, an increase from the 68% of graduating seniors cited in Figure 2. As Figure 3 indicates, the languages most studied are Spanish, French and German. Very few students studied Latin, Japanese or Chinese. As Figure 4 illustrates, almost two of every three students (64%) report at least two years of language study in high school. This is significant in that these students are well positioned to exploit the advanced placement option in foreign language study at MSU.

Though entering freshmen and graduating seniors studied foreign languages in high school in roughly similar proportions (86% and 69%), freshmen continued this study at MSU in much greater numbers (46% versus 19%). The major source of this variation is the percentage of students

TABLE 1
FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY PLANS OF FRESHMEN MSU BUSINESS STUDENTS
Results from Fall 1990 Freshman Orientation Survey

1. High School Language Study? (n = 305)

Yes	86%
No	14%

2. Language (n = 364)

Spanish	31%
French	29%
Two or more	5%
German	4%
Latin	1%
Japanese	.5%
Chinese	.25%

3. Degree of FL Study in HS and Plans at MSU

Years of FL Study	% of sample	% in FL @ MSU
0	14%	57%
1	22%	31%
2	47%	44%
3	10%	53%
4	7%	76%

4. Plan Language Study at MSU?

Yes	46%
No	54%

5. Language (n = 139)

Spanish	38%
French	33%
Undecided	10%
German	8%
Two or more	7%
Japanese	4%
Russian	1%

6. Foreign Language Degree Objective at MSU?

BAB Requirements	92%
21 hour minor	2%
30 hour major	6%

7. Familiarity with FL options at MSU
(Percent answering "Yes")

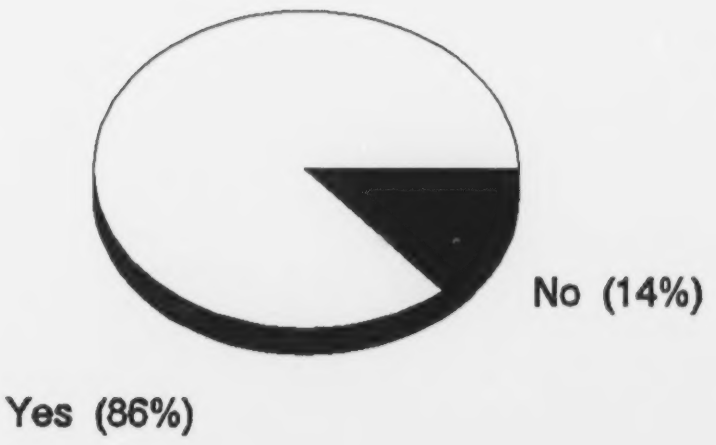
	Informed?	Clearly Explained
BAB Degree Program	74%	57%
Advanced Placement in FL	66%	57%

8. Plans for international education opportunities
(Percent answering "Yes")

	Taking FL at MSU	Not taking FL at MSU	Total Interested
International courses	48%	26%	109
Study abroad programs	19%	5%	34
Exchange programs	10%	7%	25
International internships	27%	18%	67

Figure 1

Foreign Language Study of Entering Freshmen
In High School and at MSU

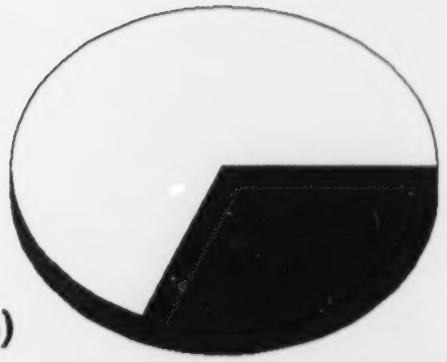


Took FL in HS?

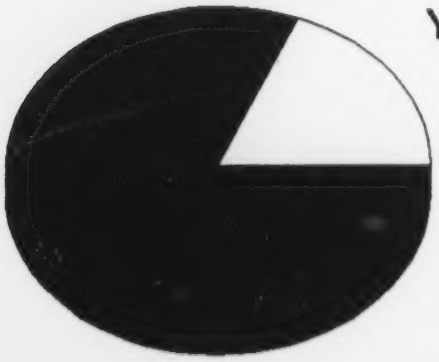
Plan FL Study at MSU?

Figure 2

Foreign Language Study of Graduating Seniors In High School and at MSU



Took FL in HS?



Plan FL Study at MSU?

Figure 3

Foreign Languages Studied

For Respondents Reporting/Planning Language Study

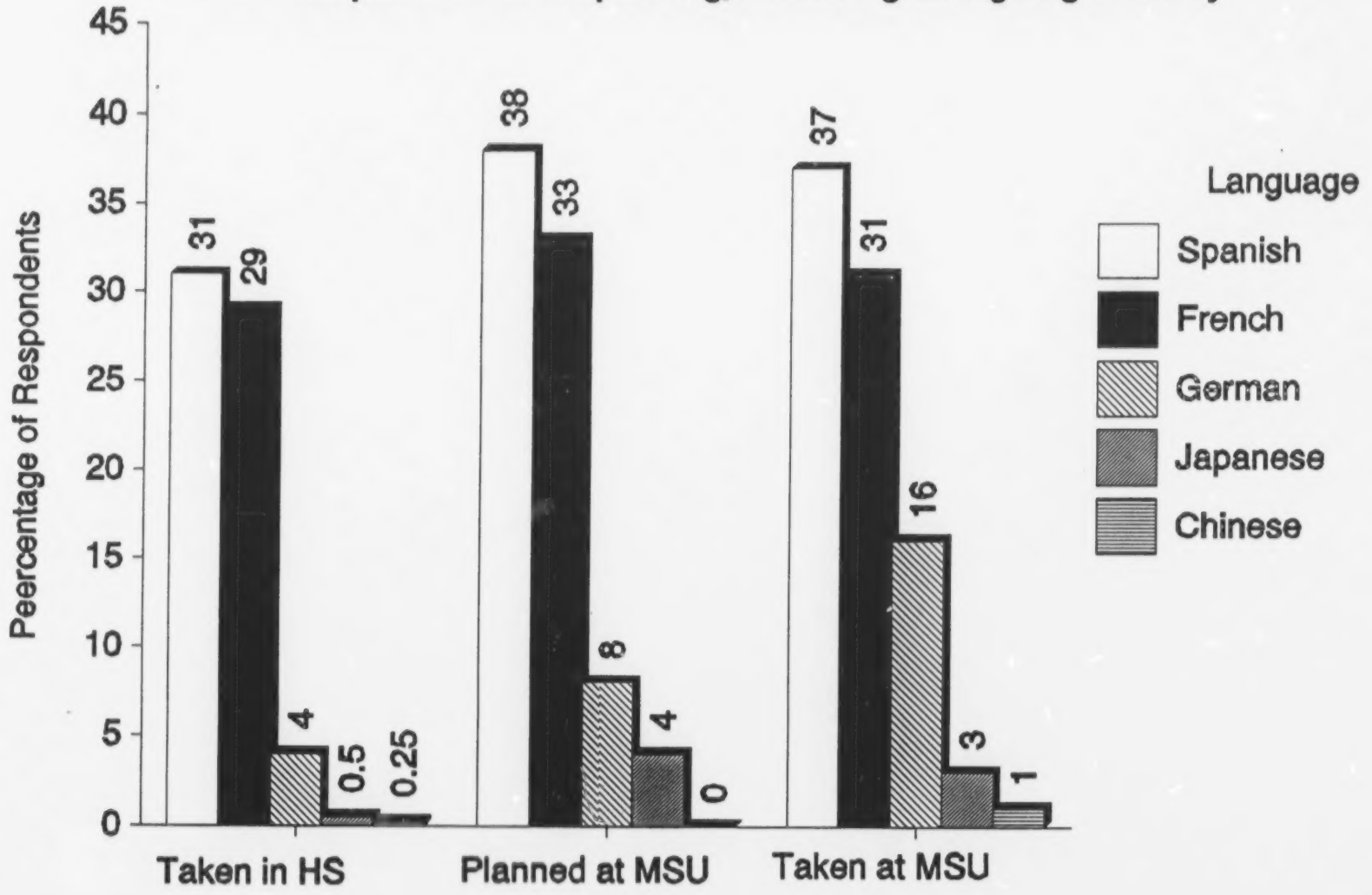
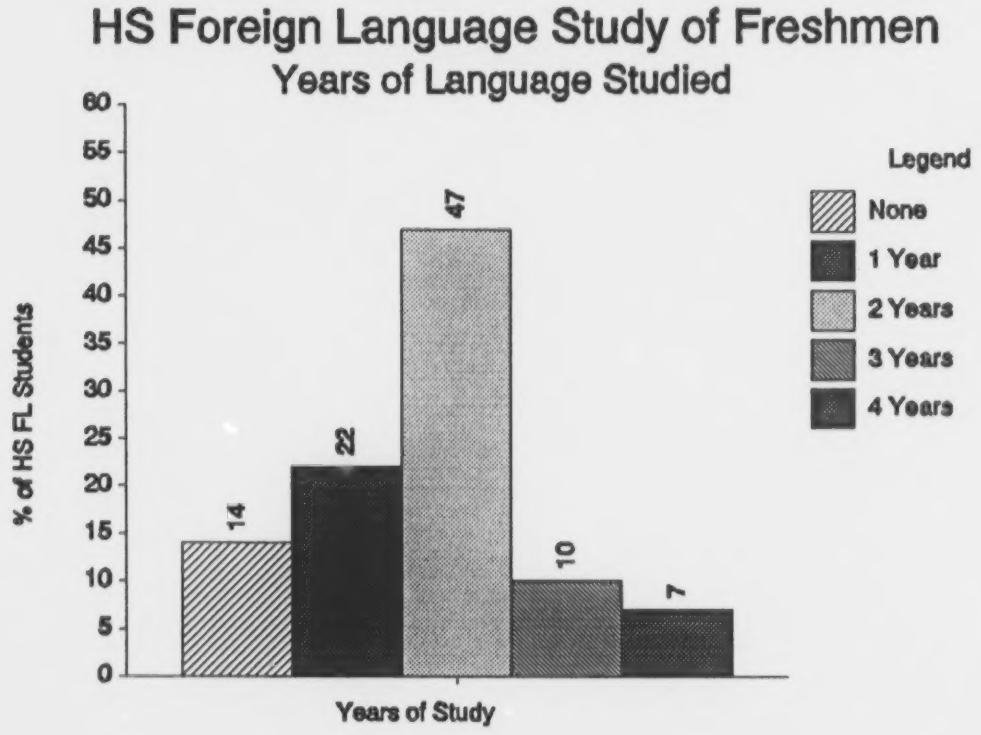


Figure 4

HIGH SCHOOL FL STUDY AND MSU PLANS



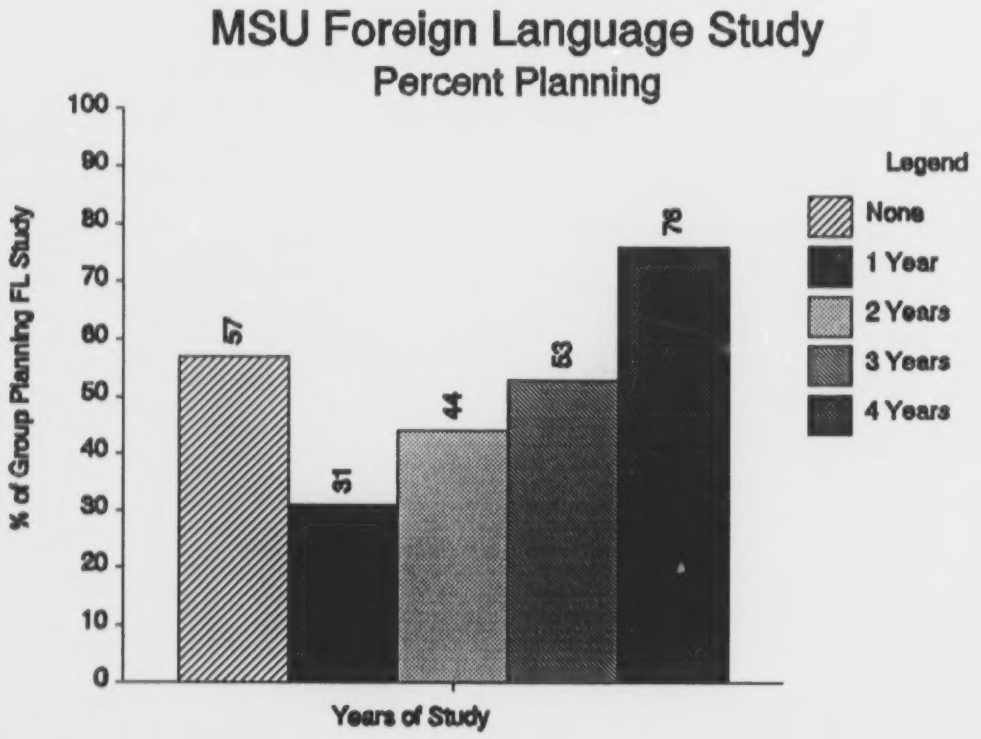
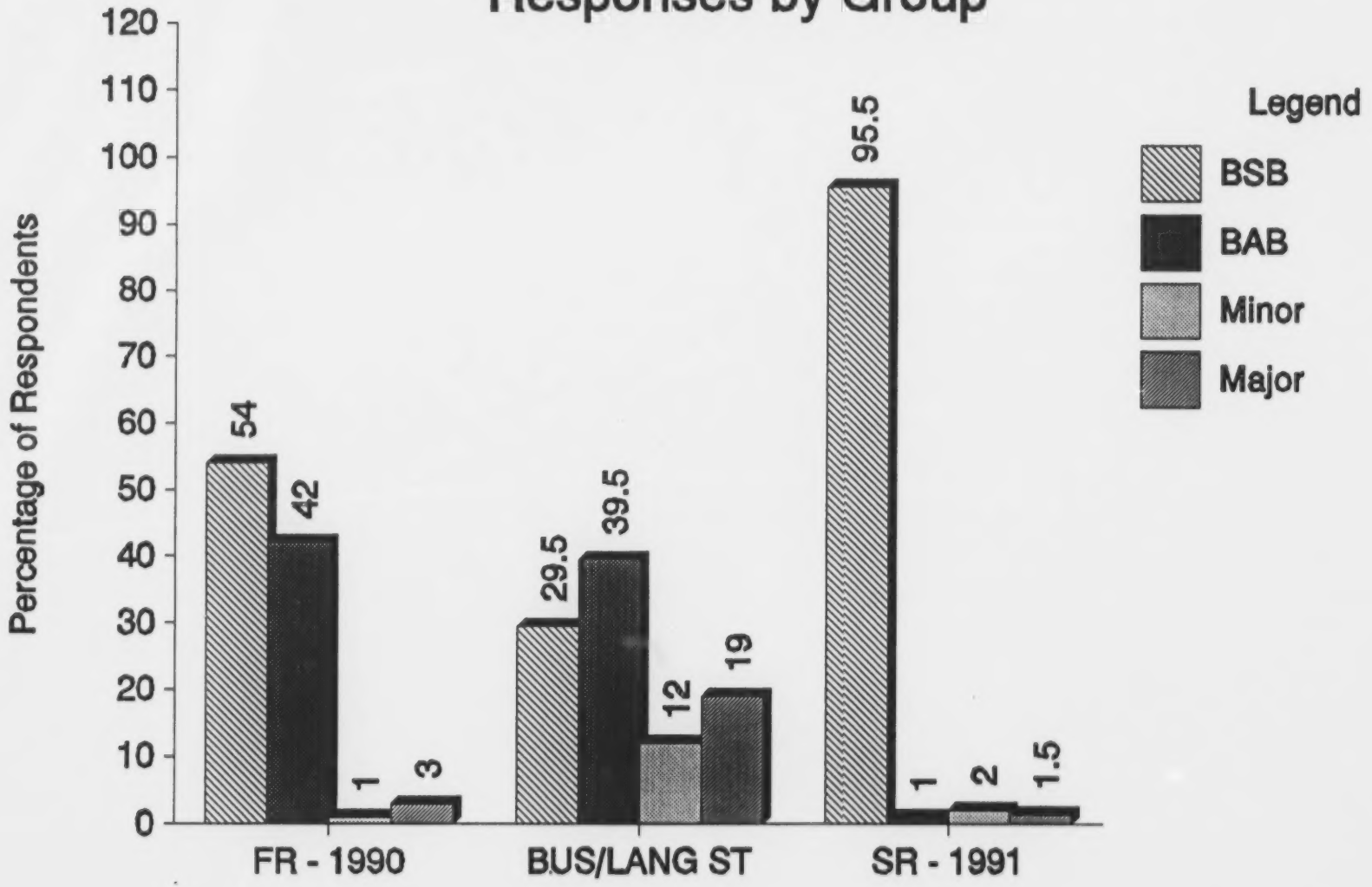


Figure 5

Degree Objective of Foreign Language Study

Responses by Group



opting for the BAB degree program (42% of freshmen versus 1%) of seniors (see Figure 5). Figure 4 matches foreign language study in high school with planned study at MSU. Generally, the proportion of freshmen planning language study at MSU rises with the length of such study in high school. The exception is the 14% of entering freshmen who took no foreign language courses in high school. Fully 57% of this group plans such study at MSU. This figure is higher than that for any other group except for those freshmen with four years of language study in high school.

Figure 6 records the results of an open-ended question which asked students not planning language study at MSU the reason for that decision. The two most common responses here are of little value. Respondents did not offer specific reasons why they had opted for the BSB degree or did not want to take foreign languages. Almost one in five students indicated that they did not like foreign language study in high school, while over one in six saw no need or use for their foreign language skills in their planned careers. About one in eight students expressed a lack of confidence in their aptitude for foreign language study based on their high school experience. One in twelve expressed the view that they had received enough foreign language instruction in high school.

While there is much obscurity in these results, it does not appear that foreign language study has intimidated a large proportion of our students. On the other hand, it is troubling that one in five business school freshmen do not see the relevance of language study for their careers. Of equal concern is the one in five students who simply did not like language study in high school. While one suspects that similar or worse results would be obtained from questions about mathematics, it also seems likely that better instructors and instruction techniques in high school would improve these figures.

In sum, comparison of entering freshmen and graduating seniors reveals that the former are slightly more likely to have studied foreign languages in high school, but significantly more likely to plan such study at MSU. The major reason seems to be active promotion of the BAB degree option

REASONS FOR NO FL STUDY AT MSU

Percent of non-language students citing reason

1.	Taking BSB, not required	25%
2.	Don't want to take FL courses	24%
3.	Didn't like FL in HS	19%
4.	No need/haven't used FL skills	12%
5.	No time for FL in MSU schedule	9%
6.	Know enough FL from HS	8%
7.	Lack FL skills	7%
8.	Won't help in career	4%
9.	FL courses too difficult	3%
10.	Didn't learn in HS FL classes	2%
11.	Undecided - might decide to take FL later	9%
12.	No response given	15%

by the College of Business and Public Affairs. Both groups have been exposed to substantial promotion efforts for international education activities, but the emphasis on foreign language study and the BAB degree have been much stronger for entering freshmen than for graduating seniors.

II. Language Students Taking Business Courses

Table 2 summarizes the results of the Spring and Fall 1990 surveys of the students enrolled in foreign language courses who were also taking business courses. There are several noteworthy results in these data. The first is the substantial percentage (55%) of respondents not enrolled in area degree programs. The second is the high percentage (31%) of these students pursuing either a major or minor in foreign language. These are students deviating from traditional paths by customizing their degree programs to include both business and foreign language components.

These figures could result from one or both of two phenomena, both of which would be promising. First, business students who begin in the BAB program are motivated enough by their experience to extend their study of foreign language to a major or minor. The second possibility is that a substantial number of language students are choosing business fields as major or minor portions of their programs. The current studies lack a longitudinal dimension and historical data from other sources is sketchy. Thus, the exact source of this results is obscure. However, the suggestion of cross-fertilization of business and language study from both directions is encouraging indeed.

III. Language Study and International Education

In each of the three surveys, we asked respondents about their actual or planned participation in a variety of international education experiences. The results are listed in Tables 1 and

TABLE 2
CHARACTERISTICS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES
Results from Spring 1990 and Fall 1990 Surveys

Sample Size = 109

1. Business Degree Objective

Area	45%
Major	43%
Minor	12%

2. Language (% of students)

Spanish	37%
French	31%
German	16%
Two or more	10%
Japanese	3%
Undec/other	3%
Chinese	1%

3. Foreign Language Degree Objective

Gen Ed electives	29%
BAB requirements	39%
21 hour minor	12%
30 hour major	19%

4. Area of Business Specialization

Accounting	23%
Business Administration	21%
Marketing	18%
Management	13%
Finance	9%
Political Science	6%
Computer Studies	5%
Business Education	3%
Economics	2%

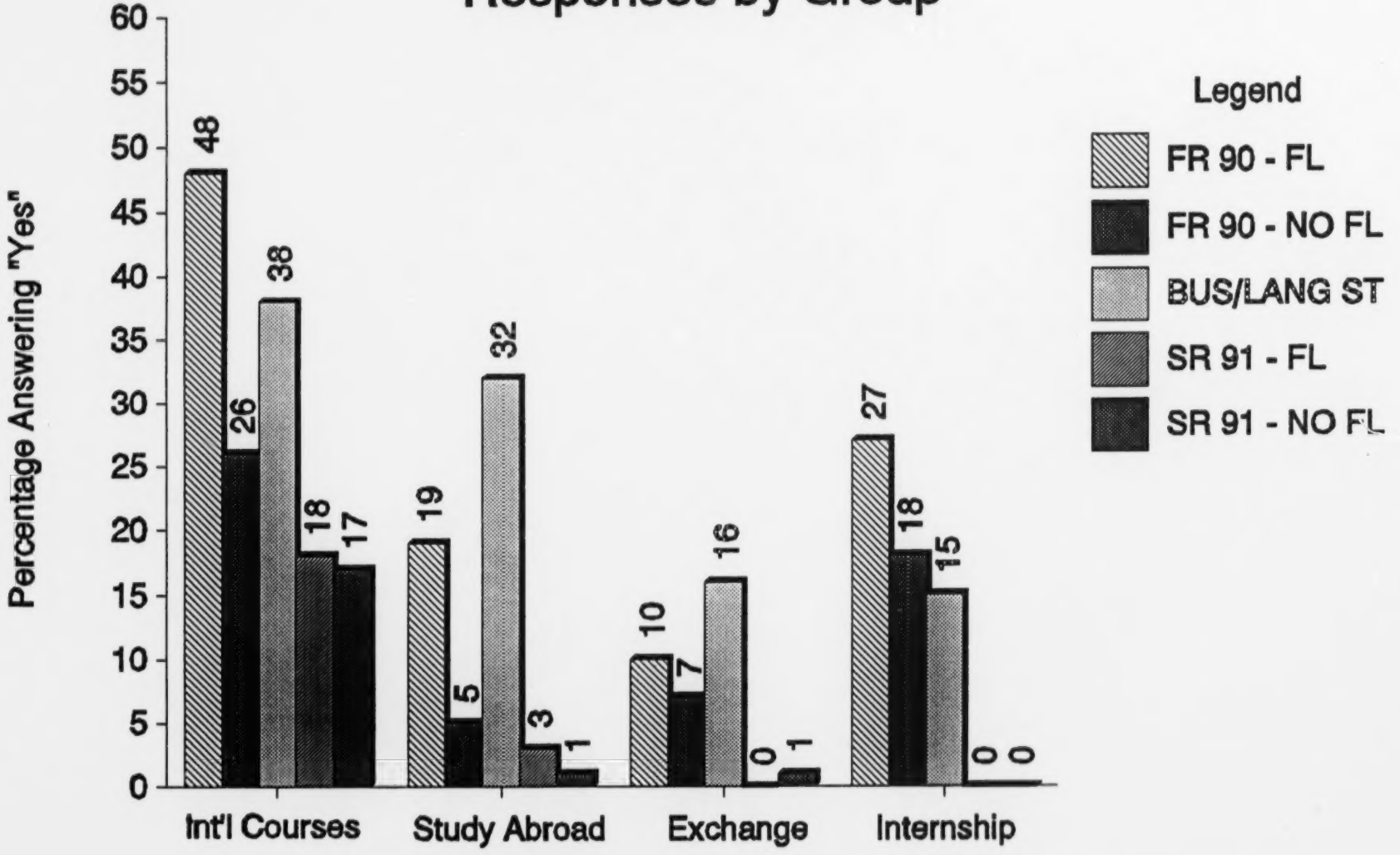
5. Participation (actual or planned) in international education opportunities (Percent answering "Yes")

International Gen Ed courses	22%
International business courses	33%
Study abroad programs	32%
Exchange programs	16%
International internships	15%

Figure 7

Participation in International Education Activities

Responses by Group



2 and illustrated in Figure 7. The most striking trend in these data is the high level of correlation between foreign language study and participation in international education activities. A second noteworthy trend is the high degree of actual or planned participation by underclassmen relative to graduating seniors. The single area (Taking International Courses) in which the participation of graduating seniors approaches that of underclassmen is largely the result of required international courses in the area programs in economics, finance and marketing.

While the association of language study with international education seems obvious, there are two mitigating factors here which increase its significance. The first is the background of the graduating senior cohort group. While this is the first class exposed to active promotion of the BAB degree, promotion of international education activities in general was well established at MSU throughout their academic careers here. The second is that the College of Business and Public Affairs and MSU's Center for International Programs created and promoted several opportunities for such activities designed for students with no foreign language skills. These efforts included exchange agreements with institutions offering business courses in English speaking countries, study abroad opportunities in the UK, and business courses taught in English in non-English speaking countries. The clear inference is that promotion of international education opportunities alone is significantly less likely to produce results than when such promotion is supported by the encouragement of foreign language study.

This conclusion has significant implications for the internationalization of business programs for two reasons. The first is the obvious direct impact on student participation. The second is the indirect impact on international professional development opportunities for faculty. Course development, study abroad and direct exchange agreements are among the most common vehicles for international faculty development. To some extent, all require the participation of students to support faculty activity. Therefore, the higher the number of students participating in these programs, the

greater the opportunities for faculty.

IV. Conclusions

This study is limited to the students of one midwestern, regional university in one academic year. However, for this institution it lends support to the following conclusions.

1) The majority of business students enter MSU with a background of foreign language study in high school. That percentage increased from 69% of our senior cohort group to 86% of our freshman cohort group of the 1990/91 academic year.

2) The introduction and active promotion of the BAB degree option increased the percentage of business students pursuing language study at MSU. The 46% of entering freshmen planning such study is double the 19% proportion of graduating seniors who did so. Moreover, 42% of the former group opted for the BAB degree, compared with one percent of the latter group.

3) Almost one third of the language students who are also studying business are pursuing majors or minors in foreign language. Thus, some degree of cross-fertilization of language and business students seems to be occurring.

4) Business students who study foreign languages appear to be much more likely to participate in a range of international education activities. This participation, in turn, creates additional opportunities for faculty participation in international professional development.

In sum, the creation and promotion of the BAB degree appears to have made a substantial contribution to the internationalization efforts of the College of Business and Public Affairs at MSU.

This contribution occurs across a range of student and faculty international education opportunities. While flaws in this study need to be removed in future efforts and the results need to be replicated across a broader sample of institutions, it would appear that the simple act of promoting language study to business students can produce far-ranging benefits for the internationalization efforts of business schools.

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